DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 473 CE 084 897

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TITLE	Disadvantage of Career and Technical Education Courses Delivered in a Comprehensive High School Setting.
PUB DATE	2001-08-28
NOTE	12p.; "Submitted to the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, Career & Technical Education, Western Michigan University."
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Delivery Systems; *Educational Environment; Educational Facilities Planning; *Environmental Influences; *High Schools; School Buildings; School Culture; *School Organization; Secondary Education; Space Utilization; Student Attitudes; Student Subcultures; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Career and Technical Education; *Michigan (Saint Joseph County)

ABSTRACT

Career and technical education (CTE) in Michigan is delivered in a variety of ways. St. Joseph County, Michigan, uses a comprehensive high school to serve all its CTE students. St. Joseph County's delivery system requires visiting students to receive CTE instruction at a site that serves as a traditional high school setting for the home students. The process to reach that decision required that pertinent research studies that were written between the mid-1970 and 2001 be reviewed to identify the potential negative social issues arising from the situation where a school serves as the home school of one student population serves and the receiving school of another were examined. Particular attention was paid to cohesiveness, clique-forming, friction, and favoritism among students and instructors. Next, the comprehensive high school based delivery system used in St. Joseph County was compared to the other CTE delivery systems currently being used in Michigan area technology centers that are located either in independent buildings or within a public school's building and that either serve multiple school districts or a single school district. The analysis established that, first and foremost, steps should be taken to ease the inherent uneasiness that some CTE students might experience as a result of attending classes in "someone else's territory." (Contains 15 references.) (MN)

Disadvantage of Career & Technical Education Courses Delivered in a Comprehensive High School Setting

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Submitted
To

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Career and Technical Education (CTE) in Michigan is delivered in a variety of designs. St. Joseph County, Michigan, uses a Comprehensive High School to serve all CTE students in the county. This design requires visiting students to receive CTE instruction at a site that serves as a traditional high school setting for the home students. The fact that a home school of one student population serves as a receiving school of another school population brings with it negative social issues. The intent of this research is to ascertain how students receiving CTE curriculum in a comprehensive high school setting perceive the school social environment. Areas of particular interest are cohesiveness, cliqueness, friction and favoritism among students and instructors.

Evaluation of CTE has focused on context, input, process and product (Finch & Crunkilton, 1993). While all of these areas are paramount in substantiating the value of CTE, another formidable criteria, student experience, is excluded from past evaluations.

Cohesiveness is described as being united with a group. Adolescence is a time of immense desire to be connected to friends and peers (Feiring & Lewis, 1993; Hunter, 2000; Way, 1997). A positive association with peer groups is absolutely necessary for cognitive and emotional growth. Several studies have resolved that relationships with peers impact not only the adolescent years but also adult life (Bagwell, Coie & Terry, 2000; McHenry, 2000; Ungar, 2000). A deterrent to cohesion is the forming of cliques that isolate and segregate students from one another. Bagwell, Coie & Terry (2000) report that clique members are formed among similar students. In many ways the visitor student is dissimilar and therefore may be excluded from the group.

The concept of friction reflects feelings similar to those found in school sports rivals. The reception of visitor students sharing the physical buildings belonging to another school may

depend on a variety of aspects of all communities involved in the sharing. Competition is an inherent part of education and socialization. Certainly the competition perceived among students from the schools utilizing the comprehensive high school will be a factor in a willingness to affiliate with one another.

Favoritism simply suggests partiality may exist among the students as well as the instructors as to whom they create intimate relations with. When students perceive themselves as unfavored their self-worth may be damaged. An adolescent's positive self-worth is established in growth literature as important for coping with life stresses (Mullis & Chapman, 2000).

Another important influence for students is peer groups. Students require peer acceptance to develop social skills such as cooperation and problem solving. Peer rejection has been seen as a predictor of adolescent delinquency and decreased self-esteem (Bagwell, Coie & Terry, 2000; Hundely & Cohen, 1999). Bagwell, Coie and Terry (2000) state that longitudinal research is needed to explore the negative impact peer rejection has on adulthood and how individuals adjust.

Similar to peer groups, friendships offer a setting for adolescents to experience socialization and interpersonal skills. Hundley and Cohen (1999) state that friends share many characteristics. It is suggested that demographics, as implied by geographic location, are the primary sources of similarity in forming friendships. Friendships have also been linked to an increase in the feeling of self-worth for those involved in the relationship.

According to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (DeMarco and Tilson, 1998), a student's experience in the educational setting involves not only the first level of the hierarchy, basic needs – safety and security – but it also impacts all of the subsequent levels including those

under growth needs and self-actualization. Much of an adolescent's life is spent dominated by school activities. One cannot disregard the impact of the educational experience on the entire life of the individual.

In their research, Newman and Newman (1976) suggest that the additional life stage of Early Adolescence (13-17 years of age) be added to Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory to more thoroughly address issues of group affiliation important to humans at this stage in life. It was their finding that the issues of early adolescence vary greatly from those of later adolescence (18-22 years of age).

Bassotti and Bredderman (1979) conducted research related to Newman and Newman's idea. Scores on the Self-Social Symbols Task and an attitudinal survey with a random sample of vocational education students were compared. The attitudinal questionnaire measured the students' perceived stigma regarding vocational training. In their conclusion, Bassotti and Bredderman report on a number of issues. Differences in scores for inter and intra-school students were significant for the following variables: deviance, school attitudes, being labeled and segregation.

Rojewski and Sheng's (1993) research on student perceptions of vocational education also considered the stigma of vocational instruction and its impact on students enrolled in these programs. In their literature review they noted researchers referring to vocational education as a "dumping ground, a second-class educational alternative, and a dead-end curriculum for non-White minority students with no other educational or career options" (p. 211).

Fortunately, Rojewski and Sheng's (1993) findings suggest that students are beginning to recognize vocational education as a viable source of education and skill. Their research also

indicates that students considering a post-secondary education perceive vocational education during secondary education an option as well.

Without a guiding theory as to how environmental variables impact a student's openness to learn we are left to administer education in a variety of formats based on issues that may or may not influence success. It is the purpose of this research paper to consider psychosocial issues such as cohesiveness, friction, favoritism and cliqueness when evaluating the students' experience in the comprehensive high school CTE design.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory states that people must satisfy needs in a way similar to climbing a ladder. A person will be unable to reach the top, self-actualization, without successfully meeting lower-level needs first. DeMarco and Tilson (1998) state that while people desire to move up, they will be unsuccessful until they meet all of the lower-level needs. It should be noted that life experiences may cause an individual to regress to a lower level on the hierarchy which requires meeting these needs yet again to advance.

DeMarco and Tilson (1998) note that safety needs to be addressed in order for students to move from focus on physiological needs to the next level of love and belonging. It is this need that substantiates a person's self-worth and enables them to perform well. The next level described by Maslow is esteem and respect. Demarco and Tilson refer to this level as the ego level. The theory suggests that at this level a person is interested in being wanted and valued. If a student acquires these needs, they are less likely to feel inferior. The final level in the hierarchy is self-actualization. At this level the student feels comfortable to pursue their personal destination in a given situation.

A second guiding theory is offered by Newman and Newman (1976). Specifically, these two researchers formulated an additional life stage to consider as a part of the psychosocial

theory developed by Erik Erikson. Their efforts to explain psychosocial theory suggests that nine life stages exists. The only way to move from one life stage to another is to come to terms with the crisis in each life stage. The use of the term crisis is describing stresses that occur naturally at each of these junctures in life. Along with life stage crisis, there are also explicit developmental tasks to be achieved at each life stage. The developmental tasks of importance at the early adolescence stage include "physical maturation, formal operations, membership in the peer group and heterosexual relationships (p. 262)," the psychosocial crises at this level is defined as "Group Identity vs. Alienation" (p. 263).

Group belonging becomes increasingly important as adolescences spend more time in activities that do not include the family. Newman and Newman propose that during this life stage adolescents are pressured by family, peers and institutions (e.g., schools) to belong to peer groups. It is within these peer groups that individuals experience interpersonal struggles involving their own values and those of the group. The individual will be expected to assimilate themselves with the norms of the group. If belonging is not possible, individuals may attempt to form their own groups that more closely exhibit their personal beliefs.

Group affiliation is also encouraged by the social system in that those who participate in the group are seen as socially acceptable and those who distance themselves from the group norm are less likely to be accepted. Further, Newman and Newman (1976) explain that the institution advances group affiliation by selecting particular groups to perform tasks that may demonstrate social status.

It should be noted that during their study Eaton, Mitchell and Jolley (1991) reported a decrease in affiliation need with age. The result of this study finds that adolescence move toward independence from peer groups just as they have from parents. Another interesting

finding of this study is that females demonstrated a greater need for social support than did the males in the study. This need for social support peaked in the female subjects at 19 years of age. Male's need for social support remained consistent without regards to age.

Present Design of CTE Delivery in Michigan

Joan Church, Michigan Department of Career Development, states that the Michigan Department of Education does not currently have a comprehensive tracking of delivery systems of CTE courses (personal communication, May 23, 2001). The profile of these systems range from Area Technology Centers located in independent buildings serving multiple school districts, Area Technology Centers located in independent buildings serving a single school district, Area Technology Centers located within a public school's building serving multiple school districts, Area Technology Centers located within a public school's building serving a single school district, Comprehensive High Schools serving multiple school districts and Comprehensive High Schools serving a single school district. The design of a particular school district's CTE course system is dependent on choices made by that individual school district. Enrollment in CTE is funded by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). The amount funded by the MDE is the same to all school districts despite CTE delivery design.

Area Technology Centers Located in Independent Buildings. This design is meant to take advantage of an independent site that provides CTE courses to students. There are two types of area technology centers located in independent buildings. The types are buildings serving multiple school districts and buildings serving a single school district. The center serving several school districts busses students to the center from all feeding school districts. A feeding school district is one that has negotiated participation in the area technology center. The

center serving a single school district does not receive students from other school districts (J. Church, personal communication, May 23, 2001).

Area Technology Centers Located Within a Public School's Building. The center located within a public school building describes a design that offers a distinct and independent area within the public school building in which CTE instruction is carried out. Once again, there are two types of area technology centers located in the public school building. The differences are the same as with independent building sites in that they are defined by whether the centers are open to multiple school districts or a single school district (J. Church, personal communication, May 23, 2001).

Comprehensive High Schools. A comprehensive high school describes the administration of CTE courses within existing public school buildings and classrooms. The difference between this arrangement and the area technology center located within a public school's building is that there is not an independent location within the school assigned to CTE courses. The comprehensive high school attempts to completely assimilate CTE courses as far as environment is concerned. Just like the other two physically different CTE designs, the comprehensive high school is also further discerned by whether the institution accepts students from multiple school districts or offers CTE courses solely to their own students (J. Church, personal communication, May 23, 2001).

St. Joseph County CTE Design. St. Joseph County is utilizing the comprehensive high school serving multiple school districts design. According to the CTE Consortium Program Session Assignment for the 2000-01 school year (St. Joseph County Intermediate School District [ISD], 2000), eight school districts are served. Four of the school districts act as comprehensive high schools that may be fed by the remaining seven school districts for any given CTE course.

The four comprehensive high schools are Centreville, Sturgis, Three Rivers and White Pigeon school districts. All eight school districts may act as feeding schools to any of the four comprehensive high schools. Figures cited on St. Joseph County's CTE Consortium program session assignment indicate that a total of 797 students are served, 405 are home students (they receive CTE curriculum inside their own school) and 392 are visitor students (receiving CTE curriculum within another school district's building).

The research supports that there are several psychosocial issues to be considered when planning an educational environment. While we may not be able to reduce all stressful components, we certainly can work to reduce the anxiety caused by placing students in a learning environment that has obvious disadvantages to some or all of the youth. Simply imagine how you might feel if following a favorite sports team to a game in which they are the visiting team. There is some inherent uneasiness when you arrive in someone else's territory. The comprehensive high school setting causes many children to experience that same feeling daily. The visiting students never really get to own their surroundings and the home students are continually trying to defend theirs.

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